



Early Lessons-Learned from Nagorno Karabakh

OE Watch Commentary: Russian defense officials have closely observed the fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the separatist region of Nagorno Karabakh. While it is too early yet to derive a full set of lessons-learned, some Russian observers are already drawing preliminary conclusions from this conflict. In the accompanying excerpt from the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, military journalist Victor Baranets points out a few lessons that he believes today's Russian military ought to take from this fight.

First and foremost, Baranets argues that Russia is “not yet very ready to fight against attacks by drone swarms,” bemoaning the fact that while “there are hundreds of light and medium-sized drones in the Russian military,” the military still does not possess “attack drones in the required quantity.” He sarcastically remarks that Russia's enemies will not delay their attack simply because “our combat drones are not ready yet.” The author stresses that “military strategists are increasingly talking about drone swarms on the battlefield.” Baranets recalls an image of “the Russian army as a huge bear with nuclear fangs,” which was being “overcome by a swarm of biting bees with rocket stings.” Even though Baranets may not agree with this “caricature,” he argues that “the subtext is serious.”

Baranets only briefly describes the other systems that have played a prominent role in this conflict, pointing out “the active use of electronic warfare (EW), ...super-modern means of artillery reconnaissance, a spotter plane...to direct the flock of drones at the target, and the active use of propaganda” were among the other measures that proved decisive on the battlefield. As it has in Ukraine and Syria, the Russian military will closely study the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh for important lessons-learned and incorporate them into its future operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“In the event of a war, you can't say: ‘Wait, enemy, our combat drones are not ready yet.’”

Source: “Готова ли Россия к войне дронов, как в Карабахе (Is Russia ready for drone war, like in Karabakh),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 19 October 2020. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/217196/4306709/>

Do we have our own drones and other “weapons of the future” that we saw in the conflict in the South Caucasus? And most importantly, is there any protection against them? Here are the thoughts of our military observer, Victor Baranets.

I confess that until my eyes hurt, I watched the videos where Azerbaijanis playfully hammered Armenian tanks and cannons with drones. And now they also boast that in this way they destroyed the enemy's military equipment worth as much as \$1 billion. And this is almost 2 annual military budgets of Yerevan!

...Familiar military experts explained to me that in recent years, Baku has spared no money on the purchase of attack drones from Turkey (Bayraktar TB2) and Israel (Hermes 900). They allegedly tear Armenian armor with their rockets.

...Reflecting on all this, one wonders: is our native Russian army ready for such a war today?

...But military strategists are increasingly talking about drone swarms on the battlefield. And this is a fundamentally new element of modern warfare.... How to deal with such a threat? Is our army ready for it? And do we have our own modern drones?

There are hundreds of light and medium-sized drones in the Russian military (though it looks like thousands are needed). But they all carry out reconnaissance and guidance tasks. And what about the heavy attack UAVs?

The heavy attack drone Hunter is now being tested... But it remains to be seen when the Russian army will be armed with such attack drones in the required quantity.... In the event of a war, you can't say: “Wait, enemy, our combat drones are not ready yet ...”

...Here's the conclusion: we are not yet very ready to fight attacks from drone swarms.

...In general, the battle in Karabakh (seemingly in a very local conflict), in addition to the traditional methods of warfare, showed at once several new “elements” inherent in wars in the near future. Here are just 5 main ones:

...The massive use of drones not only for reconnaissance and targeting artillery at enemy positions, but also for high-precision strikes against its targets.

...However, as unprecedented, the active use of electronic warfare (EW), which often and tightly cut down the enemy's command and control systems. ...And on the battlefield, such super-modern means of artillery reconnaissance appeared, which made it possible to incredibly quickly detect a position (say, a cannon, tank or missile launcher of the enemy) and hit it so that the crew or crew did not have time to escape from the place of deployment.

...Specialists drew attention to one more important point: when unmanned aerial vehicles were striking, a spotter plane was in the air near the battlefield. He directed the flock of drones at the target.

...Well, and the active use of propaganda videos (some of which could have been cooked up even in advance).

In the West, artists like to depict the Russian army as a huge bear with nuclear fangs. Recently I saw in such a malicious picture the mighty bear, who is overcome by a swarm of biting bees with rocket stings. This may be a caricature, but the subtext is serious ...